



Church of Ireland – Parish Handbook

INTRODUCTION TO SERVING ON A SELECT VESTRY

This guidance sets out the basic information that every select vestry member should know and aims to make serving on a select vestry an enjoyable and rewarding experience. As a select vestry member, you are a trustee and steward of the parish's money and resources. Thank you for taking on this important role.

WHO MAKES UP THE SELECT VESTRY?

The people who make up the select vestry are:

- The member of the clergy who is officiating in the parish (who is chairperson of the select vestry);
- Two churchwardens (rector's churchwarden and people's churchwarden);
- Two glebewardens (rector's glebewarden and people's glebewarden); and
- Up to 12 additional parishioners who are members of the general vestry and elected to the select vestry by the general vestry at the Easter vestry meeting.

The general vestry means the registered lay members of the parish who are at least 18 years old.

For unions or groups of parishes see Chapter III of part II of the *Constitution of the Church of Ireland* (the 'Constitution').

The rector's churchwarden and rector's glebewarden are appointed by the rector; the people's churchwarden and people's glebewarden are elected by the general vestry.

At its first meeting after the Easter vestry, the select vestry appoints from among its members a secretary and a treasurer. If the circumstances require it, a secretary and treasurer may be appointed from the membership of the general vestry. The secretary is also to act as secretary of the general vestry.

WHAT DOES THE SELECT VESTRY DO?

The select vestry is the group of individuals which takes responsibility for the decision-making and day-to-day management of the parish. Responsibilities include managing the parish finance and employment of lay people, providing the infrastructure to support worship and ministry, looking after the exterior and interior of church, glebe, other buildings and graveyards, and ensuring compliance with State and church legislation and regulations.

The responsibilities of the select vestry can be summarised into the following categories:

- FINANCE: to ensure all parish funds and assets are used appropriately
- FABRIC: to maintain the church, glebe, other buildings and graveyards
- FURNISHINGS: to maintain the furnishings inside the buildings
- COMPLIANCE: to comply with State and church legislation and regulations

TYPICAL ACTIVITIES OF SELECT VESTRY MEMBERS

- Attending regular meetings of the select vestry
- Seeking clarity on parish activities and finances
- Reporting any concerns or problems
- Working with fellow members and parishioners

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

- Hold regular meetings, typically between monthly and quarterly, depending on the need for decision-making and rate of activity within the parish
- Carry out good administration (follow procedures, record minutes, deal with correspondence etc.)

- Have meeting procedures for expressing views, listening and making decisions
- Understand the select vestry's collective responsibilities and individual members' roles
- Expect, uphold and respect confidentiality
- Declare any conflicts of interests between personal interests and those of the parish
- Co-operate effectively with the rector or officiating member of the clergy
- Use working groups or sub-committees of individuals with relevant expertise
- Listen to and communicate with parishioners

BASICS ON MEETINGS

- The chairperson is the member of the clergy officiating in the parish
- If a member of the clergy is unavailable, a churchwarden is chairperson
- An agenda and any relevant information should be circulated to members in advance
- Quorum is not less than half the voting membership of the select vestry
- Voting is by a simple majority of those present and entitled to vote
- The chairperson has an ordinary as well as a casting vote
- Minutes should be recorded, agreed, signed and retained

RCB guidance on 'Making select vestry meetings effective' covers more detail on select vestry meetings. It can be found at ireland.anglican.org/parishresources.

DIGNITY IN CHURCH LIFE

Every select vestry member should be treated with respect, have the opportunity to express their views and be listened to. It is important to remember and appreciate the service of each member.

The Church of Ireland's Dignity in Church Life Charter emphasises the importance of:

- Valuing everyone's human dignity before God
- Harmonious relationships which are underpinned by respect
- Process of reconciliation when disagreement or conflict arises

All individuals participating in the life of the Church have a duty under the Constitution of the Church of Ireland to uphold this Charter.

INTRODUCTION TO FINANCE

The select vestry must ensure the parish is able to meet its financial responsibilities, and that funds are used appropriately. These responsibilities are shared between all members of select vestry and not just borne by the treasurer. Together, the select vestry members have a responsibility to:

- Manage assets in accordance with trusts and legislation
- Raise income and make payments
- Safeguard the parish finances
- Support the treasurer

You should ask the following questions...

- Q. How are we planning for the parish's future financial health?
- Q. Are we taking steps to balance risks?
- Q. How much should we give, spend or save?
- Q. Is money being spent as intended by those who gave it?

The select vestry must report to the general vestry and diocesan council on what has been achieved and how the church's money has been used. It must also report to the charities regulator under charity law and, where the select vestry has control of an incorporated company, to the companies regulator under company law.

ROLE OF TREASURER

The treasurer is responsible for the financial record keeping and day-to-day management of parish finances, as well as longer term financial planning and budgeting. The treasurer will prepare financial reports as

necessary for select vestry meetings, and annual returns for the diocesan council and regulatory bodies in compliance with statutory obligations. RCB guidance on 'Finance & the role of treasurer' covers more detail on dealing with parish finances. It can be found at ireland.anglican.org/parishresources.

FINANCIAL GOOD PRACTICE

In order to uphold the financial integrity of the select vestry, good practice should be followed in all financial activities, for example:

- At least two people should be involved in counting cash
- Money should be lodged at the bank as soon as possible
- Everyone handling parish money should keep proper records
- Payments by cheque or transfer should require two signatories

ROLE OF SECRETARY

The role of the secretary is to support the chairperson and select vestry members in their activities, mainly through the duties of administration, record-keeping and facilitating effective meetings. The secretary usually acts as a key point of reference for the chairperson and members to bring clarity on procedure, legal requirements, past decisions of the select vestry etc. Although the secretary must ensure that certain responsibilities are met, other select vestry members may provide support by taking on some of the workload.

Practical tasks involved in the secretary's role may include:

- Giving notice of select vestry meetings and circulating meeting agendas to members
- Recording minutes and maintaining a minute book and register of attendance
- Receiving and responding to select vestry correspondence
- Keeping important documents safe
- Preparing reports on select vestry activities (part of the trustee duty to return annual reports to regulators)

The secretary to the select vestry also acts as the secretary to the general vestry, in respect of the annual Easter vestry meeting and any other meetings of the general vestry. In this role, the secretary will be responsible for the general vestry meeting agenda, the general vestry meeting minutes and, with the treasurer, ensuring returns are made to the diocesan council on behalf of the general vestry.

INTRODUCTION TO FABRIC

The fabric of the building means the walls, roof, ceilings, floors and the fittings needed to make it function. The fabric of churches, graveyards and other parish buildings must be properly cared for, maintained, managed, repaired and adequately insured.

Although the select vestry has a duty to manage the buildings, this duty is subject to the control of the diocesan council and of the Representative Church Body (RCB) where the property is vested in it. Where property is vested in the RCB, approval for any alterations must be obtained from the RCB prior to any works being carried out. The parish is responsible for all expenses incurred in the care and maintenance of Church property (including that property which may be vested in the RCB).

INTRODUCTION TO FURNISHINGS

The select vestry is responsible for providing furnishings for the church and other buildings and making sure they are kept clean and well maintained. The select vestry must also ensure that all the necessary materials for worship are available. These include the *Book of Common Prayer*, hymnals, Bibles, the communion plate and bread and wine. A register for recording baptisms and burials and a marriage record book must also be provided by the select vestry (although these are to be kept in the custody of the officiating member of the clergy). More detail on the precise requirements can be found in Chapter III of the *Constitution*.

INTRODUCTION TO COMPLIANCE

The select vestry is responsible for adhering to the *Constitution*, regulations imposed by the diocesan and general synods, the House of Bishops, the Representative Church Body or other Church regulations, and compliance with State law.

Legislative compliance includes reporting and compliance requirements under company and charities law, listed/protected buildings and building regulations, disability access, equality legislation, health and safety, copyright compliance, child and vulnerable adult protection, employment and tax legislation etc.

It is also essential to arrange insurance, including insurance for buildings, equipment and moveable assets, public liability insurance, trustee liability insurance, employers' liability insurance and indemnity insurance.

In law, a select vestry has no existence separate from the members of the select vestry for the time being, and is a non-corporate body. Therefore, it cannot own property or make contracts in the name of 'the select vestry'. Select vestry members individually and jointly enter into any contracts made; all members are liable both individually and collectively. It is therefore essential that the select vestry has an adequate indemnity insurance policy in place.

ROLE OF GLEBEWARDENS

Glebe wardens are appointed to assist the rector and the diocesan glebes committee in the care and management of the glebe house (rectory) and lands and are *ex officio* members of the select vestry. Practical tasks involved in a glebe warden's role usually include routine maintenance, repairs and inspections.

ROLE OF CHURCHWARDENS

Churchwardens are responsible for ensuring proper use of church property and maintaining peace and order during services. They are *ex officio* members of the select vestry.

The specific duties of churchwardens will vary from church to church, depending on tradition and practice. Generally the rector's churchwarden is expected to assist the rector in all practical matters relating to the service and the people's churchwarden is generally expected to assist members and visitors attending the service.

REMOVAL OF A LAY PERSON FROM OFFICE

A key trustee duty of every select vestry member is to put the interests of the parish before their own interests. If a member's personal circumstances change and become such that they are no longer best able to serve their parish as a member of the select vestry, it is expected that they voluntarily step down from their position. The chairperson and other select vestry members should be sensitive to the issue, supportive and understanding of the member's decision.

If a select vestry member is unable to effectively serve their parish but is unwilling to step down, a request may be made to the diocesan court for an order of the bishop or archbishop regarding the matter. Any layperson holding an office may effectively be removed from their position by written order of a bishop or archbishop who, in a number of circumstances prescribed by section 15 of Chapter 8 of the Constitution, may declare the office vacant. These include circumstances in which the layperson:

- Is convicted and sentenced by a civil court of any criminal offence;
- Has ceased to be a member of the Church of Ireland;
- Has been incapacitated by mental infirmity;
- Has neglected or refused to attend and give evidence at any trial or investigation held under the authority of the Constitution.